

Kirk ^{NS} ^{8/14/03} presents goals to county

■ **List includes harbor cleanup:**
Congressman expects land
value to increase \$300 billion

By Jim Newton
STAFF WRITER

The cleanup of Waukegan Harbor, transportation funding and economic revitalization for North Chicago are among the legislative goals U.S. Rep. Mark Kirk, R-Highland Park, told the Lake County Board he is pursuing for his district.

Kirk spoke to the board for about an hour at the beginning of its regular meeting Tuesday.

Kirk said the cleanup of Waukegan Harbor has been hampered by disagreements among the various agencies involved over exactly what needs to be done to bring the harbor up to acceptable standards.

"At some point, we will have to agree on what clean is," he said.

Kirk said he favors going with U.S. Environmental Protection Agency standards for clean waterways in addressing the harbor's needs. Consensus needs to be reached so that the project can be completed, paving the way for Waukegan's revitalization.

Waukegan's property values would increase by \$300 billion with the cleanup project completed, Kirk said.

"What's happened in Kenosha and Racine is the same future that we in Waukegan could have," he said.

Kirk said he is also fighting for more stringent pollution control standards for coal-burning power plants, which he said are responsible for rising levels of mercury in Lake Michigan and local rainfall.

He said he will introduce a measure in the fall that would impose the same standards on coal-burning plants that are imposed on municipal incinerators.

"Rain water in the northern suburbs has three times the level of mercury it should have," Kirk said. "Instead of cleansing, it is contaminating."

Kirk also said he continues to work for the creation of a joint Navy/VA hospital in North Chicago. "I want the Navy to move into the VA so that the VA will never close."

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Kirk said he hopes the northern site at Great Lakes Naval Training Center in North Chicago will be reopened next year, a move it could release about 5,000 cars to lay back into the city's once bustling business district.

Closing the gate "killed the North Chicago business district," he said. "I hope opening the gate will spur economic development."

Kirk also told the board that the amount of money channeled to Lake County from the upcoming federal transportation bill will depend on the size of a gas tax increase being considered by legislators. An increase of up to 12 cents per gallon is being considered, but Kirk predicted the final figure would probably be about 5 cents.

He said he remains confident that funding for the widening of the Route 60 bridge over the Tri-State Tollway, a project that he has designated as top priority, will be included in the bill.